

LEAVITT FORGES FRAGILE TRUCE WITH THE UEA

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Gov. Mike Leavitt has forged a fragile truce with the Utah Education Association, apparently by indicating his push for high technology in the classroom will not come at the expense of teachers.

The governor reiterated last week that he will present a plan to the 1994 Legislature to increase computer-assisted education in Utah's schools, but he declined to provide details on the plan's cost. But following a closed-door meeting Monday with Leavitt, UEA President Lily Eskelsen said the governor appears to be "on the right track with technology.

"He made it very clear he was not looking to replace teachers with technology," she said. "I was very impressed with what he had to say."

Last month, the UEA was sharply critical after Leavitt called for the heightened use of computers and two-way video in schools, colleges and universities.

At the time, Eskelsen said the plan was a "horrendously bad idea" if the governor planned to replace teachers with computers. And she complained about the idea of using some school construction funds to pay for high-tech equipment.

But Eskelsen said the governor also made it clear that school construction would not be sacrificed to boost computer budgets.

"He said he saw the big revolution with computers and technology at the higher education level," she said.

Leavitt, while denying he now is backing off his vision of technology in public schools, confirmed he sees the "immediate best gain" for increased computer and television use as being in colleges and universities.

The governor stressed that his speech last month in Cedar City was to set a course, not to implement specific programs.

"I wanted to signal a long-term direction for the state. I did not intend to specify how technology would be used," Leavitt said.

Although the governor and UEA now say they are in accord on the issue of education technology - including the need for more teacher training - spending priorities are still likely to divide them.

The teachers' union is pushing for increased salaries from the 1994 Legislature. Those pay-raise requests will compete with other education needs.

Still, Leavitt believes he can avert a funding feud with teachers.

"I don't see us directing ongoing operating funds to technology, therefore I don't think we are in conflict," the governor said.